

What's the Outside Like?

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Summary: Art was a family secret. He was the bastard child that never existed. No one was supposed to know about him, so when did this boy become so close to him? NiceArt AU set in the Heian period of Japan. Rated T for themes of domestic violence and language. I apologize for any historical inaccuracies that may show up, if you find any please point them out to me.

1. Chapter 1

"If you leave this room before I return, I will see to it that you are locked up in your room for the next week straight," the woman hissed through cracked lips before slamming the shoji to a close, leaving the pale boy to his own devices. Art knew that she meant every word of her threat; she had made similar ones in the past and kept true to them.

Her words came as no surprise to him though. It's not as if they were something he didn't know the reason behind. Oh, he knew full well of why she tried to give him a scare each time before leaving him by himself in a room. It was only natural that his 'mother' wouldn't want the bastard child of her husband and his mistress to be seen, nonetheless a cross-dressing one. But it's not like cross-dressing was a life style choice for him, much less a preference, but rather something that was forced upon him. After finding out that his mistress was pregnant with his child, Art's father vehemently objected to the idea of bringing it into his family. Takuya Sakatsu already had plenty of heirs to adopt his estate when he died, and two beautiful daughters that he could marry off to any rich man he picked, so he saw no need for a bastard child that would only stain his name. However his mistress had other plans, and sadly parted from this world promptly after giving birth to her only son, Art. It was a strange name that only made his father hate him more, claiming it was actually perfect for him. "A strange name fitting for a child's whose fate is to be ostracized," he would always tell him.

It was his father's wife that decided Art would be raised as a female. She came up with the self-proclaimed brilliant idea that once he was old enough, they could sell him off as a beautiful bride to any perverted old geezer that would pay a pretty enough penny for him. And thus began Art's perfectly plotted life, retained strictly to his father's estate. Few were to know of him and he was to know none.

It was a lonely life, but Art had no room to complain, less his mother strike him for it. Since they didn't want many to know of his existence, he at least understood why they were strict with his roaming privileges. He had tested the waters a few times already, daring to leave his assigned room "or more fittingly, his cage" to explore the large expanse of the estate fitting of the Sakatsu name. Though he was punished with sharp cuts on his feet to prevent him being able to comfortably walk too far after each time he was caught, he found the pain to be minuscule in comparison to the fruits one of his small adventures out bore him.

One day, when he was 10, Art was lucky enough to stumble upon a young servant boy the about same age as him. It was the third time that Art had taken the risk of sneaking out of his confinements to explore a bit of the ever large estate that he was kept on, and he chose to venture out to see the garden this time. He had seen glimpses of it before while being moved to a different room in the house, so he knew they had one and that it made up for a good half of the estate itself, he had just never been granted permission to set foot on it. But that chilly autumn morning Art decided to change that, and that's when he met Nice.

"I-I'm sorry! I didn't know there were guests over!" It was a given that Nice wouldn't know of Art's existence when his family tried so hard to make sure that was the case with most all of the world.

"It's no trouble, really. Please, carry on with your chores," Art decided to leave out the details of who he was, less he get the other boy in trouble for knowing about him. This was the first person his age that he's ever gotten to talk to, the first person that wasn't his controlling mother and a select few servants that he's ever gotten to talk to, he'd be damned if he was going to mess this up for either of them by getting one of them in trouble.

The servant boy visibly relaxed with a smile that was completely new to Art's world. How could one smile so easily like that? Was that the gift of freedom? "Thank you, little miss! I'll make sure to clean up this garden nice and pretty so that you can properly enjoy it!"

Art was left completely speechless by the other's seemingly unlimited kindness toward a total stranger. Are most of the people outside my room like this? Or is he just ridiculously nice? "Um, thank you," he tucked a piece of hair behind his ear before nervously continuing, "I myself, and I'm sure the rest of this family, appreciate your hard work," he tried to look everywhere but at the other boy, too wracked with nervousness to make eye contact. Communicating with others was not something he had the privilege of doing when cooped up in one room day after day, so casually talking with someone else was a foreign subject to him.

The other boy stared at him for a second, he looked like he was trying to figure out if he recognized Art as one of the Sakatsu kids but couldn't recall ever seeing him. "It is my job, after all," he raked up the last of the leaves that fell with the new season. As pretty as the maple trees' leaves were, Art knew that his mother would not stand to see a single one 'tarnish her perfect canvas'. "Do you visit this house often? This is the first time I've seen you here."

The boy, who Art noticed was a brunette with a collection of bandages on his face "perhaps from his housework?", spoke straight to the point and caught Art off guard. Should I tell him? It would be safer for us both if I lied. But I'll probably never meet him again, so he'll most likely forget me like a dream after a while.

"Actually," he paused to look around, checking for anyone that would recognize him, "I live here. Just not with everyone else." He wasn't telling the complete truth but he wasn't lying, besides, being vague was probably better for the both of them if anyone found out Art had met one of the servants while being outside when he wasn't supposed to be.

"You live here?" round blue eyes that seemed to reflect the rest of the world that Art had yet to explore blinked at him, their owner tilting his head as if to add an extra question mark to his question. "I've never seen you around. Do you just not like coming outside?" It was an innocent question with more impact on Art than the other boy would ever know, or at least not realize until years down the road once he had learned more about Art.

Art somehow managed to smooth over the question without any hindrance in his voice aside from a light tremor in the beginning, "I'm kept inside. I'm not allowed outside of my room." It was ok to tell a boy he just met this, right? He won't even remember Art in a week, right? Oh god, he won't get punished if I tell him, right? "But I wanted to see the garden for once, so I snuck out," Art's eyes anxiously darted around their sockets left and right to double check if anyone was eavesdropping or coming their way.

"Snuck out?" Shimmering eyes full of bemusement and something similar looking to admiration were wide and dead set on Art, making him shift in discomfort. "So you're," the servant boy suddenly lowered his head and leaned in so that Art could hear him whisper, "a secret?" Art was left stunned, staring back at the other boy with his mouth open unceremoniously wide. Why does he say it as if I were some type of national treasure? I'm sure if he knew, he wouldn't speak of me as if I were a jewel that he had found one day on the sidewalk and decided to keep in his pocket as his own little treasure that no one would know about. I'm sure if he knew

"Yes, I'm the bastard son of the lord of this house," he bit out scornfully. I bet you're appalled now that you know the truth, aren't you? Go ahead, run away"

Without Art even blinking in time to notice, the servant boy who was just raking the leaves had ran across the distance separating them and wound his arms around Art without a single word. Art could feel the overwhelming warmth emanating from the other boy seep through his layers of clothing and crawl its way under his skin. Who knew humans could be so warm Having another person's arms around him was a new experience, and he wasn't quite sure yet whether he was enjoying

it or not. He feels safe, somehow

Frail arms tentatively wrapped around the other boy's frame. That's funny, why am I trembling?

"I'm Nice," his voice came out steady and resolute, like he had been deciding on something this whole time and just now came to a firm decision, and it rang in Art's ears as loud as the temple bells at the top of the mountain did when people paid their respects to the Gods. Unbeknownst to young Art Sakatsu, Nice the servant boy would soon become to him a god that he would pray his thanks to daily.

"I'm Art, it's nice to meet you."

2. Chapter 2

Knock, knock, knock!

"Mmnh!"

Knock, knock!

"Mmâ€|Yes?" Heavy eyelids slowly swept the sleep off of themselves as Art shifted around on the floor for a bit before reluctantly sitting up and crawling across the tatami mats to where the screen door was.

Today he had been moved to the south wing of the estate since there would be guests over in the part of the house that Art was usually kept in, and his mother would not stand having him within a ten mile radius of guests.

This room was much better though, as the south wall of the room was a screen door that opened up to the huge garden in the middle of the estate property. He slid the screen open enough to peek out to see his visitor, a sleepy smile growing on his face when he saw who it was. "Good afternoon, Nice."

"Hey! Sorry, it looks like I woke you up from a nap," the brunet grinned sheepishly while he habitually scratched one of the bandages on his cheek.

"It's fine," Art shook his head with a faint smile that always seem to find its way onto his face when he talked to Nice, "But shouldn't you be working right now?"

The other dismissed the notion entirely with a wave of his hand, "I wanted to show you the cherry blossoms that have bloomed!" Nice was grinning like a mad man.

Art gave it a moment of thought, well, everyone is preoccupied with the guests. After a long pause of consideration, Art responded to his friend with an adventurous gleam in his eyes, "Alright, but we have to be careful not to get seen," the excitement was easy to spot in his voice.

Nice didn't miss a beat in grabbing the other's hand and shooting up as fast as a bolt of lightning, "Don't worry, I'll make sure to keep

an eye out!" And without another moment to spare Art was being dragged out of his room and into the garden.

"W-wait! Slow down, Nice!" Art's giggling mingled with the chattering birds that took up residence in the many trees of his father's garden. He could hear Nice laughing in excitement as well, only adding to the high he got from sneaking out of his room to see what his mother wouldn't allow him to.

"Look," a finger pointed ahead, "they just started blooming now that it's spring!"

Art's breath caught in his throat as they seemed to fly down the path lined with cherry blossom trees that were at the highest peak of their beauty, all in full bloom. He felt weightless with Nice pulling him further and further down the rows of trees with pink flowers that dotted his vision like little kisses from the sun. Their petals came down to greet him personally, caressing his skin so lightly he could swear they were a ghost's fingers.

It wasn't until his feet had suddenly stopped moving that he noticed Nice wasn't pulling on his hand anymore, but now he was just holding it and looking at Art with the most serene smile he had ever seen.

"It's like a whole other world, huh?"

"Huh?" Oh, yes, it's amazing," do you mean the outside or being with you?"

Art was too busy watching the cherry blossoms float around him like miniature stars to notice the smirk on Nice's face. "Come on, I want to show you something else!" Right as a petal was about to land on Art's nose he was yanked forward, forced into a jog.

The rest of the cherry blossom trees whizzed past them as they left the grove and entered a part of the garden decorated with shrubs and an arrangement of flowers. Their footsteps slowed down and Nice led him to a glistening pool of water with big dots of oranges, blacks, and whites that darted around underneath its surface. Upon closer inspection, he realized that they were koi fish, something he'd only seen in illustrations. He noted that the real things were far more beautiful and captivating than their still, painted brethren.

"I didn't know we had them. They're like miniature water dragons," purple eyes were fixated on the colorful fish in the pond.

A chuckle of bemusement escaped Nice, "I guess they are. Spring is their favorite season because they get to eat all they want after sleeping for the winter."

He got no reply from Art who was progressively leaning in closer and closer to the water until the point where Nice had to hastily grab hold of him before he fell in. "Woah, that was a close one! I know they're pretty but you don't need to see them that up close," The blatant worry and fear from the shock Art just gave him faded into a chuckle with underlining relief.

Purple eyes met blue ones and blinked several times before darting away to look at an incredibly interesting rock on the

ground.

"S-sorry..." _Good job, Art, you managed to almost fall into a pond looking at _fish.

This time Nice's trademark laugh was cut short by new voices making their way to their location. Art recognized one of the voices immediately. Lavender tinted hair tossed left and right as he frantically looked around for the body to match his mother's voice.

Luckily, Nice was quicker to act and sprinted off toward a cluster of trees in the garden with the other boy in tow. They could hear the familiar voice amongst several unknown ones come closer to where they just were and the young servant didn't stop running until they had put a safe amount of distance between themselves and the voices.

The two of them gasped for air behind a thick-trunked maple tree. Chests heaving, their eyes met and both could see that they both had gotten a thrill out of their close escape from being spotted.

"Eheh...Ahahahaha!" they simultaneously burst into crippling laughter, holding their stomachs with each breathless giggle that escaped them.

The spring of Art's twelfth year will always be dated as one of his favorites.

3. Chapter 3

The autumn breeze suddenly wrapped itself around Art, causing his body to gently rattle involuntarily. He tabbed his place in his book with a slip of paper before closing the book and setting it on the low table in the center of the room. Turning his body toward the door, he saw that the chilly wind had come from a crack in it and the one that opened it wasâ€œ|a fish?

Art slowly rose to his feet and padded over to the open door. Upon closer inspection he noticed that the fish was actually made out of color paper, folded to resemble a fish. He picked it up with caution and carefully turned it over in his hands to examine it. The yellow paper fish had no note of ownership on it. _So where did it come from?_

A flash of blue glimmered in the corner of Art's eye, and when he turned to see what it was, he found himself looking eye to eye with his only friend on the estate. "Niceâ€œ|," he breathed out the name with either weariness or relief, Nice couldn't tell which.

The smile in the servant boy's eyes was impossible to miss. During years of communicating through secret, Art would sometimes only get to catch a glimpse of his friend once the whole day. Due to their more often short rendezvous, the two had over time learned to read the other's mood and mind by things as simple as the way one turned their head or how long they held their gaze.

"Do you like it?" The smile in his eyes momentarily switched to nervousness, and Art was fast enough to catch it. As care free as

Nice tried to act, his friend knew that he would still fret when it came to giving others things.

"Very much so, thank you," Art said with a reassuring smile that instantly calmed Nice's nerves. "Is there a reason you're leaving paper fish at my door though? Is this your version of house; bringing home the food like a good husband?" Art giggled at the color of pink Nice's cheeks turned from his teasing.

"Iâ€"No, that's notâ€"I meanâ€"Not that I would be against marrying you, it's just that'sâ€", " Nice looked anywhere but at Art's face as he stumbled over his own words, only intensifying the hue of his cheeks. "It's origamiâ€"! A yellow fish symbolizes freedomâ€|, " his last sentence came out a mumble, obviously making him just as embarrassed as the teasing had.

Art stood there in shock for a moment after the purpose of the paper fish set in. He couldn't decide which emotion to choose to display from the chaotic mess of them swirling in his heart. Luckily, if his current life has taught him anything, it's how to keep his composure. "I seeâ€| How thoughtful of you," he smiled and looked down at the token of freedom in his hands. To be entirely honest, at first he was offended, thinking Nice was mocking his situation where he was anything but free. But one look at the origami told Art of the hard work and meaning put into it, along with the excited, albeit cautious, smile on his friend's face. The piece of colored paper was brimming with good intentions, just like his friend.

"It's a good luck charm. To give you hope!" Nice's brown locks seemed to bounce from the momentum of his buoyant attitude. Art swore he could see rays of sunlight shining from the boy's face every time he showed him that dazzling smile of his.

"Hey, do you know how to do any other shapes?" If Nice was kind enough to make something with such a significant meaning for him, he definitely wanted to return the favor.

Nice's face lit up like the sun, more than happy to share his newly acquired knowledge with his companion. "Yeah, lots! What did you wanna make?"

"Hmm...Can you show me how to fold a dove?"

"Sure, that one's pretty easy!" More colored paper appeared from inside Nice's _kosode_. He finally stepped into the room and slid the door shut behind him, splaying the different patterned paper on the floor for Art to choose from. Art went with a flowered design and many paper cuts and failed attempts due to Nice's bad teaching later, produced a neatly folded paper dove.

"Here," he pushed his hand with the dove to Nice's hands.

"You're giving it to me?" Nice returned the gesture with a quizzical look.

"Yes, because it means something special," he placed the paper bird in his friend's hand.

"What does the dove stand for?" Art gained another confused look in response.

"That's a secret," he smiled warmly at Nice, who only tilted his head and stared at his smiling friend.

End
file.